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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 006486

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/22/2015

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SUBJECT: MFA DISCUSSES COORDINATING ASSISTANCE ON BELARUS
AND POTENTIAL VISITS TO RUSSIA, UKRAINE AND KAZAKHSTAN

REF: STATE 168836

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT, FOR REAS
ONS 1.4 B/D

1. (C) Summary: Aurelia Bouchez_, the MFA's DAS-equivalent for Russia and the former Soviet space, welcomed reftel demarche on promoting democratic and election reforms in Belarus, although she wondered how effective external broadcasts would be given the technical difficulties of transmitting radio/satellite signals into Belarus. She said that FM Douste-Blazy was hoping to visit Moscow sometime in 2005, possibly in October. In addition, she said that President Chirac's recent illness had only postponed his announced visits to Ukraine and Kazakhstan until early 2006; the GOF had assured the two countries that the visits would not be cancelled. End summary.

COORDINATING ASSISTANCE ON BELARUS

2. (C) On September 21, Poloff discussed reftel demarche on coordinating democracy and election reform assistance in Belarus with Bouchez_ and Antoine Gosset, desk officer for Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. Bouchez_ said France agreed that the upcoming elections in Belarus were an opportunity to focus on democratization and election reforms. There was broad agreement about this within the EU, said Bouchez_. As a first step, France believed it necessary to educate citizens of Belarus about the EU, its "European Neighborhood Policy," and the importance of democracy and free elections. Gosset added that the population of Belarus was very isolated, and that it was certainly conceivable that if genuinely free elections were held, President Lukashenko would still win.

3. (C) Responding to the demarche, Bouchez_ asked if the USG had any specific proposals to counteract the Belarus government's blocking of broadcasting from outside the country. She said radio signals could only penetrate a few kilometers into Belarus territory. Still, she said, the GOF recognizes external broadcasting could be quite useful in the pre-election period and it looks forward to discussing technical options. Bouchez_ emphasized in particular the possible utility of the Internet as a medium to disseminate election information.

GOF VISITS TO RUSSIA, UKRAINE AND KAZAKHSTAN

4. (C) Bouchez_ confirmed that Commerce Minister Christine Lagarde would visit Russia September 21-23 with a delegation of business leaders of small and medium-sized companies. She said the MFA was not planning the trip, nor did it plan on participating in Lagarde's meetings, although Bouchez_ said an as-yet-unannounced trip by Economic Minister Thierry Breton in October or November would necessitate more intensive MFA participation. FM Douste-Blazy also planned on visiting Russia before the end of 2005. Although no date had been fixed, the MFA and the Russian government were looking at October as a possibility.

5. (C) Poloff asked whether President Chirac still planned on visiting Ukraine and Kazakhstan despite postponement due to the President's recent illness. Bouchez_ said the GOF had contacted both governments to assure them that President Chirac planned on visiting both countries, and expected that these visits would take place in early 2006.
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